The North Adams Switchboard Association

Local
History
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THE AUTHOR MARIE DAVIS

Although North Adams was a small village, it was only seven years from the time that the telephone was invented that they had one in North Adams. In April of 1883, the Bell Company had made plans to put a telephone in the village and in September of that year, they were ready to say "Hello" to Hillsdale and other cities. I think the first telephone was in the Huff & Foote Drug Store (corner store).

In 1890 it was moved to the R.H.Jackson Hardware (Payne & Green location) and in March of 1895 to the store of Rickerd & Company (last building on East Main on the south side).

In June of 1901, the Bell Station moved again, this time to the store of C.J.Knapp (corner store) and Levi Rickerd was the agent. This same year the Bell men were in town putting in 15 to 20 instruments in the Doctor Offices and several stores.

In the spring of 1902 work was started on lines for local service. The switchboard arrived in July and was put into position and six rural lines were connected.

One of these lines was the line between North Adams and Moscow. A meeting of the residents of that community met at the Grubby Knoll Schoolhouse and elected officers. Each member was to deposit $5.00 with the Secretary for the expense of building the line. The poles were to be 25 feet long, not less than 4 inches at the top;Theywere to be peeled off and made from white oak, yellow oak, swamp oak, tamarack, black walnut or cedar. They had to use No. 12 BB wire and all have Stromberg-Carlson telephones. The name of this line was to be "The Moscow - Adams Telephone Company". A switch at the George Durga house (1st house South of Moreland Road) connected the lines between North Adams and Moscow.

This was the regular procedure of all rural lines coming into the village.

Later there were three other lines that had switches to connect us to Addison, Somerset Center and Hoxie.

In January of 1903 lines from the East were constructed, also one to Osseo. By the completion of this line to Osseo, the village could call Pittsford, Ransom, Shadyside and Frontier. Through the Hollin Office, you could call Hudson and Adrian. "Free"

Mattie Creego was the operator. When you called the operator, you were to give the number of the line and tell her the ring: such as line A7, 1 lomg, 1 short, 1 long, (1L1S1L).

In 1903 , The North Adams Telephone Co. (village company) had received a new switchboard and had it installed in an upstairs room on the East side of the Rockwood building. In November the Bell Company moved their switchboard in with the Telephone Company and rural lines with George Myers as manager. In February the Bell Company removed their

switchboard to the O.C.Smith residence (location of Lynch Bros. Insurance) directly across the road with Mrs. Whepley as their operator. This was in 1904.

Rules of 1904: Week days 6 AM until 10 PM; Sundays- 8 to 9:30 AM; 12 to 1:00PM; 5:00 to 6:30 PM. Night service for important business only. The ring for central was one long ring on all lines except Jonesville and Moscow which would be 2 long rings.

By 1905 there were 211 phones paying into the Company, 35 in the village and 176 farmer phones. They raised the switch fees to $3.00 per year. During this year a telephone booth was purchased for people who made calls from the office. This booth was used in the office until the Company was sold.

In August of 1905 the Stockholders of the North Adams Telephone Company had a meeting at the Opera House and voted to sell the Company to Charles Knickerbocker of Concord plus the switchboard, office furniture and cable, He took possession September 1. The

Telephone Company was to own the poles and the lines in the village.

Grace Corbett continued as operator.

They moved the office in August 1906 across the hall into the rooms where it was located until it was sold to the Southern Telephone Company.

In 1907 the first directory was printed. There had been directories printed by another Company called Rural Telephone Directory containing numbers of Jonesville, Mosherville, Litchfield, Moscow, North Adams, Jerome, Allen and Hanover. Another one contained names south and east of North Adams. The telephone line name was given in these directories: Caskey Line, Denning Line, Ideal Telephone Company, South East Adams Line, Locklin Line, North Adams - Hoxie Line etc.

In the first directory the Telephone Company printed the ringing code with letters- V long 2 short long. Around 1908 or 1909, they printed the second directory. An announcement

was made:" This being our second attempt at properly listing and numbering the names and telephones of our patrons. We trust we shall be able to remove some of the inconveinces we have had to contend with in our first directory."

"Our principal difficulty has been due to similiarity of letter sounds. To avoid this all former 'F' parties are now 'FM', all 'G' parties 'GN', all 'S' parties 'SD' and all 'V' parties'VS'. This does not affect the rings just the name only." The ringing code was printed for the operator.

In 1910 John Fitzsimmons bought the Company of Knickerbocker.

In 1914 the North Adams Switchboard Association was formed. This consisted of all the rural lines and the North Adams Telephone Company. The rural lines and the telephones were still to be maintained by the Line Company and phones by the individual.
Around 1914 F.E.Douglas went in as manager and was there until October 1919.

—Citizen Patriot Photograph.

FRIENDLY OPERATOR—Typical of many rural telephone operators is Mrs. Nellie Hill, North Adams, who has been serving the community 24 years. In addition to handling the calls, she is friend, confidante and helper to subscribers all along the line. Many are the aids she is asked to do, such as calling the doctor or finding the owner of a copy of "Pilgrim's Progress."

A new ringing code was set up in 1916 for example: Telephone number 717, line 7, code 17, 1 long, 2 short, 1 long; 2706, line 27, code 06, 1 long, 2 short.

Mr. and Mrs. Howard Staley followed Douglas as manager. He was there from October 1919 until March of 1920 when W.E.Frederick took over the management.

Mr. Frederick managed the office until March 1934 when Mrs. Nellie Hill took over. She held the position until the Association was sold to the Southern Michigan Telephone Company of Brooklyn in 1954. The Company remained at this location until the new building on the south side of East Main was completed in 1956.

There was another change in the ringing code set up around 1947. The letter F was inserted between the line and the ring. For example: 26F22, line 26, ring 2 long and 2 short. When two numbers were in the ring, the first number was long and the second number was short.

In 1954 The North Adams Switchboard Association was reorganized into the Headwaters Telephone Company, owning both village and telephone lines.

After the Southern Michigan Telephone Company purchased the Headwaters Company later in the year of 1954, they converted over to the dial system in November 1958.

The first code set up for the dial system wasAtwater 7 (AT 7) but later turned to the numerals 287-5581.

So from one telephone in 1883 to 1985 there has been a great many "Hello" in the past 102 years.

W. E. Frederick

—Citizen Patriot Photograph.

CHRISTMAS CALL—Christmas came early for North Adams' popular telephone operator, Mrs. Nellie Hill, center, who's been on the job since 1924. She received a brass telephone converted into a table lamp from Dean Jennings, president of the Headwaters Telephone Co., and Mrs. Jennings, secretary of the company. Mrs. Hill, who works the night shift because she prefers it, has no thoughts of retiring.

NORTH ADAMS PHONE OPERATOR RINGS UP 31 YEARS OF SERVICE

Bob McGregor

North Adams- After 31 years at the switchboard, Mrs. Nellie Hill, telephone operator at North Adams since 1924, got her Christmas present early - it was atelephone.

However the telephone she received was one of the table, upright style in gleaming brass and made into a lamp. The donors were officials of The Headwaters Telephone Company, formerly North Adams Telephone Association.

Hundreds of patrons of the exchange have become admirersof the spritely, gray haired woman who admits readily to having celebrated her 72nd birthday. Since she took up her post she's often been in the thick of excitement like when the school was burned, the fire set by an arsonist only recently released from Southern Michigan prison.

FORMER MANAGER

Mrs. Hill has been "jack" of all trades in the business, managing the company from 1934 until it was reorganized in 1954. During that time she doubled in brass, acting as chief operator in addition to conducting the business, billing and buying supplies. Her son, Franklin Hill, at the same time was in charge of the line work, and often others of her four children took turns at giving her a lift at the switchboard.

" Usually when anyone gets a gift for so many years it means retirement," she smiled. "But not for me. I wouldn't know what to do with so much time on my hands."

Mrs. Hill works the night shift, which she prefers, and her five assistants carry the daylight trick. She takes up her post at midnight and works until 8 a.m. "Then I do my housework and rest. I do not need much sleep."

Mrs. Hill admits there is one time when she doesn't enjoy herself at the switchboard. That's during an electrical storm when lightning " comes right into my lap".

PLEASANT TASK

Some of the most pleasant memories she has are those when many local young men during World War 11 and the Korean conflict called their parents in North Adams from such places as London, Paris, Rome and the Hawaiian Islands.

"I really enjoyed helping them complete their calls." she said.

One businessman pretty well summed up the thinking of the community when he said: "Of all the thousands of times I've talked with her, and heard her talk, and some of the situations she's been in, I've never heard her utter a cross word."

From Jackson Citizen Patriot
Jackson, Mich.
Sunday, December 18, 1955

GENERAL RULES 1911

Profanity or other abusive language is forbidden by law.

Notify the operator in advance if you intend to make several sucessive calls.

In case of fire notify the central as to its location and the operator will do the rest.

In case of fire, if prevented from talking by smoke or otherwise ring several times sucessively.

Non-subscribers are not entitled to free use of l lines such messages are chargeable to the telephone from which the non-scriber calls.

When through talking, give the crank one turn , as a signal to central to disconnect the wires, which are reported "busy" until signal is given.

Speak directly into the transmitter, not too loudly, nor too rapidly, but plainly. Do not pitch the voice high even when talking over long distance.

Do not engage an operator in conversation.

RULES 1911

Always call by number

For Party Line Subscribers

Do not listen to the conversation of others. No subscriber should use the line to the exclusion of others and line calls should be deferred when the line is wanted through central or for a long distance call.

Take the receiver off the hook and listen to ascertain if the line is in use. Should the line be in use hang up the receiver and try again later. When central calls "Number" answer promptly.

FIRE CALLS

Notifying all the firemen was handled by the operators before the siren was installed.

In early days when a fire call came into the office from a rural or village phone, a general alarm (one long ring) would be rung on lines near the farm or street to call in neighbors for help. This general alarm was also used to notify patrons for special meetings or if help was needed.

Later a siren was installed at the fire station but was operated from the office by the operators to call the firemen. Several short blasts for the village and two long for the rural calls.

When there was a fire call, it was pandemonium at the switchboard as everyone wanted to know where the fire was located. I was at the switchboard when the North Adams Schoolhouse burned in 1927. You could not take care of all the calls that came in. I was a student at the school at that time, we always

wished the schoolhouse would burn but it was different when it actually happened.

A picture of some of the connections made on the farmers lines when they were maintaining their own lines. A loop in the splice - "Why does my telephone keep cutting off"? The other a limb grown through the wire.

One man told about a neighbor, buying a roll of rusty baling wire at an auction and going to use it to repair his telephone line.

SOME OF THE OFFICERS OVER THE YEARS

1903

President	-	J.M.Williams
Vice-President	-	Abe Williams
Treasurer	-	H.E.Young
Secretary	-	C.J.Knapp
Manager	-	L.H.Richard

1920

President	-	Giles Stevens
Secretary	-	John Duguid
Treasurer	-	J.M.Williams

1927

President	-	J.D.Knowles
Secretary	-	John Duguid
Treasurer	-	J.M.Williams
Manager	-	W.E.Frederick

1930

President	-	J.D.Knowles
Secretary & Treasurer	-	F.W.Payne
Manager	-	W.E.Frederick

1934

President - Herbert Wells

Secretary & Treasurer- B.R.Shepard

Manager - Nellie Hill

1943

President - Lemuel Roberts

Secretary & Treasurer- Marie Davis

Manager - Nellie Hill

1946

President - Jay Speer

Secretary & Treasurer- Marie Davis

Manager - Nellie Hill

1948

President - John Quarton

Secretary & Treasurer- Marie Davis

Manager - Nellie Hill

1950

President - Howard Tucker

Secretary & Treasurer- Marie Davis

Manager - Nellie Hill

1952

President - Dean Jennings

Secretary & Treasurer - Marie Davis

Manager - Nellie Hill

Compiled by

Marie Hill Davis
(daughter of Nellie Hill)

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Davis, Marie
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